ventnorensis

journal of the ventnor botanic garden friends' society

'It is easy to see why the *Echium Pininana* is popular, with its tens of thousands of tiny blue flowers raised to heights above 3m'

– Chris Kidd, Curator

Volume 21 No. 2 Summer 2014

summer/autumn opening times

10am till dusk daily
For opening times for Visitor Centre, *edulis* Restaurant and Plantation Room Café, Plant Sales and Greenhouse, please call the Garden on 855387 or check website, www.botanic.co.uk

exhibitions/events

5 July until 27 July
Open Gardens scheme in association with The British Red Cross, 10am to 5pm each day. Trail Maps £1.

Every Sunday until 31 August
Lazy Sundays at VBG. Sunday brunch, followed by BBQ and live music. From 10am. Suitable for all the family.

24 July – 28 August
Every Tuesday and Thursday, Kids Discovery Days. Free to all Garden admission payers except Falconery Lessons, bookable in advance.

2 August
Chale Show. 11am – 5pm. Visit the Friends in our new Gazebo. Free for children.

9 – 10 August
The Healing Festival. 10am – 5pm. Celebration of alternative therapies and natural healing. Live music and super foods

11 August
Quantum Theatre presents *Alice Through the Looking Glass* and *The Tempest.* 2.30pm and 7pm. Adult £12, Concession £10 and Child £6.

22 August
London Contemporary Theatre presents *Treasure Island* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* 2pm and 7.30pm. Adult £12, Concession £10 and Child £6. Refreshments will be available to purchase during the interval.

30 – 31 August
Wolverton Manor Garden Show. Visit the Friends in our new Gazebo. £5 in advance, £6 on the day.

4 September
VBG Lecture Series: British Coastal Art 1770 – 1930 with Professor Robin McInnes. 7pm. Fascinating discussion on British Coastal Art.

13 September
The Extraordinary Travelling Film show presents *Little Shop of Horrors,* doors open 6.30pm, screening begins at dusk. Advance purchase tickets: Adult £8.50, Concession £7.50, Family Ticket £27. Discount of 5% for 10 or more.

21 September
Hops Festival. 10am – 5pm Celebrate another successful harvest of the hops grown at VBG and picked by Friends.

29 October
Donation Day. 10am – dusk. Make a donation, large or small, to visit.

Striking: Most people remember the first time they ever saw an Echium Pininana. Photograph by Julian Winslow

Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society

President
Brian Kidd

Chairman
Chris Kershaw - 852409

Vice Chair
David Grist - 852100

Treasurer
Kay Grist - 852100

Secretary
Rosemary Stewart - 292107

Membership Secretary
Caroline Peel - 872375

Events/Advertising
Mrs Debbie Honeybourne - 854044

Editor Friends' Website
Colin Smith - 856578
Email: smith3c@hotmail.com
www.ventnorbotanicfriends.org.uk

***Ventnorensis* Editor**
Roz Whistance - 753090
rosalind.whistance@btopenworld.com

Gardening Volunteers
Wednesday mornings 10.00 am
Jean & David Kelley - 853221

Curator
Chris Kidd

Garden Address
Ventnor Botanic Garden
Undercliff Drive
Ventnor
Isle of Wight
PO38 1UL
Telephone: 01983 855397
Fax: 01983 856756

Contents

Regulars
Curator's Notes 2
Chairman's Message 4
Plant Profile 6
John Curtis's Summer Update 8
Weather in the Garden 18
Editor's Letter (Survey) 11

Notice Board
Chale and Wolverton Shows 3
Garden Volunteer Meet 16
Discounts for Members 5
Tropical House Appeal 16/19
Design Walks 16
Membership Form 14/15
Garden Passes Discount 21
New Members 28

Friends' News
Opening Times ..... Inside Front Cover
Osteospermum named 5
Obituary 17
Drive Thru Garden Update 19
Annual General Meeting 22
Botany Club Reports 24
Summer Garden Party 26
How to Volunteer ..... Inside Back

Special Features
Meet our Party Supremo 27
Hill Hassell's Legacy by A H Taylor 20
Mammoths to Microbes
by Prof Mary Edwards 23
Favourite Places –
Edinburgh's Floral Clock 10

Printed on the Isle of Wight on 50% recycled paper using vegetable based inks
recycle

Curator's Notes

Fascinating conclusions from the Living Database

As a result of the efforts to make the work of this Garden transparent I had a query about the Living Collection database, what it is and how it should be used. As the main tool in garden curation it's not just a list of what's in the Garden, and its value isn't assessed necessarily by when it was last stock checked or audited.

There are many fields within the database and opportunities to record observations. It is the observations that relate to the *accession* not the *taxa* that are important. This importance may not seem to have any value at all on first consideration, but the observations should ideally be made because at an unknown time in the future they could be useful or even valuable. For example, there are a number of Echium this year with fasciation. If noted, we could have seen a pattern from when this mutation occurred; nobody knows quite why fasciation happens, it has been suggested the mutation could be linked to sunlight. Perhaps, if we had recorded the instances when it first became apparent, we might have found it had a direct correlation to known solar activity, or another factor. Is the occurrence increasing over time? Is it absent in some years? Is it affecting more or fewer species? The questions go on, and more could arise in future from people far cleverer that could draw fascinating conclusions.

Noted: Pollination of Puya and Kniphofia details being recorded for database. Photographs by Rosemary Stewart (above) and Julian Winslow (below)

In recent years much more is being made of phenology, the science of noting times of year when living things reach developmental stages, for example leaf fall, bud burst and flower opening. The late Nigel Hepper began as a hobby keeping records of first

flowerings. Nigel was, at this point, an undergraduate who would later in life become Deputy Keeper of the Herbarium at Kew, and he would also contribute to landmark publications such as the Flora of Tropical West Africa. He had no grand purpose, he was simply doing the kind of thing that educated middle class men did, and the value of his records – kept in his own private books – didn't become apparent until much later, when it became an important demonstration of climate change. These are the sorts of records we should make.

I'm not suggesting we note every blasted thing that flowers, but prudent observations of timely events give this database power

Now I'm not suggesting we note every blasted thing that flowers every minute of the year, but prudent observations of timely events, unusual occurrences etc, these are the things that give this database power. Previously updating of the database has been periodic and linked to when staff time is quieter, but I think we should have the ability for everyone to record things they notice in order for these to be reviewed before being put into the LC database. David Kelley, one of our Friends, has begun some pollination of Puya and Kniphofia at the Garden. The times of this have been recorded and are now on the database. If these little snippets of information continue to be recorded at regular intervals, who knows what they may reveal at some future point?

Chris Kidd, Curator

Chale Show and Wolverton Manor Garden Show

The Friends/CIC have recently bought a new gazebo with VENTNOR BOTANIC GARDEN printed round the top. We have booked sites at Chale Show and Wolverton Manor Garden Fair and will be taking some plants to sell and telling people about the Garden and encourage them to visit. Both shows are well worth visiting and do encourage your friends to come and say hello, and pick up some information about the Garden and the Friends.

Chale Show
2nd and 3rd August

Wolverton Manor Garden Show
30th and 31st August

Chairman's message

The Garden fights back

Our esteemed past Chairman, Phil Le May, has stated that he hoped that 2014 would be 'The year the Garden fights back'. "We have achieved far more than the mistakes we have made but if we don't sing it loud and clear that then becomes our mistake."

A campaign to spread our good news and make those successes speak for themselves was begun by David Kelley and Richard Smith, working with John Curtis. We are now fortunate to have David assisting Chris Kidd with the *kniphofia* and undertaking invaluable work to help him on the Accession Database (adding new plants to the database).

Sadly, Richard always knew that the time he would have to give would be short, and we had to say our farewells to him just a few weeks ago. We will miss his influence and wisdom greatly and extend our condolences and good wishes to Dilys and their family. [See Obituary, Page 17].

Let me recount some of the recent good news. The tally of buildings and areas of our Grade II listed Historic Botanic Garden estate (according to the English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens) which John Curtis's team has renovated, repaired, and generally brought up to standard has continued to grow with the development of the old Royal Hospital workshop outbuildings and new routes through the herb garden. Chris Kidd and the gardeners have done sterling work repairing the upper South aspect of the Tropical House [see Page 16] and transforming the area to the North of Undercliff Drive into a potentially stunning sub-tropical eye-catcher [see Page 19].

The concept of Café Scientifique soirées were introduced to London in 1998 by the late Duncan Dallas, based on Marc Sautet's 1992 Parisian Café Philosophique. Now the idea has been adopted at VBG, with the invention of a Café Botanique! This remarkable lecture series has included some outstanding contributions on scientific aspects of botany, ecology, climate and evolution by eminent international experts. A happy symbiosis exists with the local Shanklin-based Island 'Café Sci', with many attending both events. "Le Chapeau Botanique" collection afterwards helps to defray costs.

Our Membership Secretary Caroline Peel has distinguished herself and shown us that high quality fund-raising events can now be hosted by the Friends at the Garden. Through her personal labours and leadership of her organising committee, a most successful 'Summer Garden Party' was held in May, attended by the High Sheriff. This raised a considerable sum which will launch the Friends' Apprentices Reserve fund. The seed for an eventual "Education and Apprentice Trust" perhaps?

Encouraged by her example the executive committee organised a Midsummer Soirée. The lucky Friday 13th evening was attended by the Lord Lieutenant and raised approximately £600 apiece for the Friends and St John Ambulance.

Our first undergraduate student, Fleur Otridge, arrives on 1 July, an arrangement the result of a collaboration with Portsmouth University Biological and Sciences Dept. Fleur will be carrying out a bee survey in the Garden, under the supervision of Chris Kidd and Dr Rocio Perez-Barrales. Collaboration with other departments at Portsmouth University including Art, Literature and Architecture are also on the horizon. As for our own store of knowledge, a plan to find a home at last for the Friends' library co-located with an office for the Curator, a Botanical Science resource centre and an Education base is gradually emerging.

Finally, Botany Club's most recent visit to the meadows of Mount Joy, Carisbrooke under Chris Kidd's direction was a great success [see Pages 24 & 25]. A dramatic illustration of the stifling of plant diversity through mowing included study of the profusion of common spotted and pyramid orchids. Even more dramatic was Rosemary Stewart's description of running for cover amongst the gravestones with her mother to escape strafing from a German WW2 fighter in 1943. Friends, I can't begin to tell you how lucky we are that she survived! She certainly keeps me on my toes!

I know she joins me in encouraging you to search out those nice new Friends' notice boards (procured and affixed with his own hand by David Grist!) and to come along and join us in spreading the good word and recruiting new Friends and volunteers at Chale Show, 2nd-3rd August, and Wolverton Manor Garden Fair, 30th-31st August.

Chris Kershaw, Chairman

Osteospermum "Lisa Traxler"

During his Autumn propagation programme in 2012 Jason, our Nursery Manager, found a seedling *Osteospermum* on the South African Terraces. This particular plant caught his eye as it had a very good white colour on a vigorous plant with very dark foliage. Of particular note was that on the day of its discovery the sky was overcast and yet this white flower was fully open, unlike so many *Osteospermum* that open only in bright sunlight. Jason collected cuttings from the plant and grew it on to full size for evaluation during 2013 and we have begun selling the plant as a cultivar. During our first fundraising dinner at the Garden in the spring of 2014 we offered the naming of the plant as a lot in our auction, which was won by Lincoln Miles who requested the plant be given the name *Osteospermum* "Lisa Traxler" in honour of the highly acclaimed local artist.

Chris Kidd

Echium pininana The gentle giant

Popular: Tens of thousands of tiny blue flowers. Photograph by Julian Winslow

When composing Plant Profiles for *Ventnorensis* it's often easy to overlook the obvious through familiarity. Perhaps a plant for which this Botanic Garden is rightly famed is one that we don't tend, plant, propagate or mollycoddle. It has grown, as though wild, here for over thirty years. It has been seen as so symbolic of the Garden that it even, briefly, became our logo for a short while, though some considered its twin spikes emblemic of some darker purpose. It is the plant which we are asked the name of more than any other; I have long thought we should wear shirts bearing the legend: "It's *Echium pininana*".

It is easy to see why it is popular: flower spikes with tens of thousands of tiny blue flowers much beloved of bees raised to heights around 3m. I suspect everyone can remember the first time they saw one. My first encounter was with a group of keen students from Kew, Hillier's and Wisley, where was one growing from a dry stone wall outside Trebah Garden, Falmouth, in Cornwall. Nobody seemed to know what it was except Barry Philips who told me it was an Echium. I thought he had lost his mind: Echium to me was the Vipers Bugloss of chalk downland. It wasn't till closer study that the real story of *Echium pininana* revealed itself.

Echium pininana evolved in isolation in La Palma in the Canary Islands. The Canaries, for so many reasons not least being they are islands that have never had a land bridge, have a fascinating plant ecology with roots in the northern European flora. Familiar plant genera and families have representatives that, in isolation, have evolved into ecosystems quite different from their relatives, so Echium – known to me then as the short but showy wildflower – has changed into new and different types. *Echium pininana* found its natural niche at the uppermost limit of the lauraceous forest ascending the central caldera.

Speculation is that in this splendid isolation it adopted, through natural selection, the characteristics of gigantism. Gigantism is seen at a particular altitude on mountains throughout Africa and South America: plants are of monstrous size, especially in their trunks. It is speculated that a lack of competition has allowed these lonely giants to monopolise the scant nutrient resources. The likelihood of successful regeneration in the harsh environment is pitifully small, hence a strategy of producing hundreds of thousands of flowers, and thus seeds, in the hope that a single one over a lifetime of many, many years will succeed. *E. pininana's* strategy is somewhat more of a gamble, reproducing once in its biennial life.

The earliest arrival of Europeans, though relatively undocumented, had a profound impact on the balanced ecology of the island. For two thousand years man degraded the laurel forests to the point where habitat loss pushed *Echium pininana* into a precarious position in the wild state, while in cultivation it is often considered a weed.

At Ventnor Botanic Garden the current self-sustaining population of *E. pininana* was introduced by Simon Goodenough in the 1980s (there is evidence of earlier experimental plantings before this time, but the plant would have been considered something of a trophy in the unevaluated microclimate that was still to reveal its true potential. Most likely it simply wasn't given the opportunity to seed by the overenthusiastic and very gardenery gardeners of that time). Simon's plants were sourced from the Canaries' botanic garden and produced a stable population that was remarkably pure, so much so that they were the group of study for Mike Maunder's PhD in the 1990s. Sadly, from a purist's point of view, it wasn't long before a tom got in with the pedigrees. Another species, the red flowered *Echium wildprettii,* from Tenerife, hybridised with the *E. pininana.* From then, we have had a hybrid swarm at VBG; the flowers of our giants are now a little murkier than the sharp blue of the true species.

Gigantism is seen at a particular altitude on mountains throughout Africa and South America: plants are of monstrous size, especially in their trunks.

In context, this hybridity isn't necessarily a bad thing. Consider the precarious natural populations of *E. pininana* (and its neighbour *E. wildprettii*, or the other neighbouring species for that matter – there is almost one per volcano). It is in their best interest to keep the door open to cross pollination and potential hybridity as new genetic material could offer an advantage to future populations. Therefore these species are non-obligate outbreeders, they can self-pollinate, but given the chance to cross with another plant – they will take it.

Later introductions of new Echium species have increased the hybridity of our populations. The introduction of the shrubby, branched *E. fastuosum* saw hybrid plants that become ungainly. This is an example of where new genetic input has resulted in plants that do not have an advantage, the sheer weight of plant matter that the *E. pininana* genes drive coupled to the branching that the *E. fastuosum* genes bring to the feast make a plant that breaks apart under its own weight. This is natural selection in action; these hybrids are unlikely to succeed in passing on their genes because the plant fails before maturity.

From a horticultural point of view *Echium pininana* is a winner every time. Commercially, our hybrid plants are big sellers both as plants from Jason's nursery or as packaged seed. As a scientific study there has been one PhD gained already, and there is certainly evidence enough for fascinating future study of its breeding system and those of its close relatives. A very new speculative hybrid (*E. pininana* x *E. gentianoides*) looks very interesting indeed, it is a hardy perennial, giant, and has Gentian blue flowers in Chelsea week. If *E. pininana* has any drawback at all . . . it simply needs a good common name.

"Excuse me, what's the big tall blue flower like a Lupin?"

"It's an *Echium pininana*"

"An Ekky mum?"

"ek'-i-um"

"Does it have a common name?"

"I'll write it down for you"

Chris Kidd, Curator

We've cleaned the house, ready to welcome the guests

John Curtis reviews the 24 months since the CIC took on the Garden and announces the next initiatives

On July 11th this summer we will mark the two year anniversary of the transfer from the Isle of Wight Council to a Community Interest Company created to improve and preserve the Garden for future generations. We can look back with some pride at the pace of physical improvements that have taken place in the last 24 months beginning with the arrival of a 7.5 tonne digger at the entrance and ending with the off hire date last week of a massive cherry picker which carried Gardener Dean Miller and Curator Chris Kidd to new heights as they completed the replacement of all the polycarbonate panels on the first story of the Tropical House. This issue of *Ventnorensis* will launch the final appeal [see Pages 16 & 19] so we can finish the ground floor panels in time for the BBC's arrival to film our Giant Water Lily in action this August. Based on the little everyday frustrations I observe and hear, we have many "hearts and minds" issues left to address. Fixing buildings is the easy part of transforming VBG.

As I commented at the Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends Society AGM, we have cleaned up the house and now it is time to invite guests over. The next 24 months will therefore be less about capital projects and more about marketing to increase visitor numbers. To begin this next phase in earnest we have brought in Darren Cool, one of the most experienced 'attraction' marketing executives on the Island. We have only just begun our marketing journey, despite a complete rebranding and moving the marketing budget up by a factor of six. As an example of what can be achieved, our new seed

packaging and the creation of the Seed Shop in the entrance atrium increased June seed revenues by 250%, despite a worrying drop in visitor numbers. We have also been pleased by the efforts of our agent, Wight Locations, who have filled Signal Point for the summer season, adding a new and important revenue stream to fund the Garden. We will not just wait for visitors to find us, we will also create unique VBG products like Botanic Ale[SM] that we can take to a wider market. Early tasting results from our *Eucalyptus globulus* based cordial created with Medicinal Herbalist, Claire Hudson, are encouraging.

It is not our buildings and Gardens that will define us, but rather what people are doing together in them. The guiding principle will continue to be "making botany accessible"

After cleaning up the house and inviting guests we will concentrate on being better hosts. Think staff training, welcoming smiles, better signage and simple things like doors open at the right time. I recently described our vision for the coming years as one based on people, not just development projects. It is not our buildings and Gardens that will define us, but rather what people are doing together in them. The guiding principle will continue to be "making botany accessible." When I saw a photo of Ruth and David Kelley pollinating our *Puya chilensis* with a delicate paint brush lashed to a long bamboo pole I saw a superb example of what we mean. The engagement of a wide group of volunteers and staff in the machinery of VBG from the Accessions Database to our Propagation List is critical to the modern and vibrant botanic garden we aspire to be. Please talk to our Curator if you would like to get more involved in an aspect of managing our plant collection, whether you visit once a year or every week.

Looking across the marquee at the fundraiser for VBG apprentices in May I sensed that Caroline Peel will more than match our progress of the last two years as she and the Friends Executive set their sights on a stronger and more active Friends Society.

Green shoots: We can look back with pride at the physical improvements and look forward to being better hosts. Photograph by Julian Winslow

Favourite Places

In the last issue I invited you to share your favourite gardens so other Friends might visit when they're 'off Island' this summer.

I did hesitate before offering this suggestion to all you serious plants people, but growing up, my annual visit to Edinburgh would have been incomplete without visiting the Floral Clock in Princes Street Gardens. Each year it had a different design, and as a young child it was fascinating to me that plants could grow on that moving Big Hand. The best thing, of course, was when that big hand reached 12 – for then came the loud mechanical whirr, the anticipation as the eyes of all settled on the little wooden house behind the clock, and slowly, oh so slowly, the big black cuckoo would emerge, say his piece, and retreat. Then again, and again . . .

Thanks to Rosemary for visiting the Floral Clock this June to take this photo for me!

Roz Whistance

Dear members . . .

In the Spring issue we asked for your opinion about *Ventnorensis*. Would you be happy to receive an online version instead of a printed edition?

Well, some said yes and some said no. The yesses tended to be brief and to the point:

"I would be happy to receive the magazine online to save the Friends money."

"I confirm that we are happy to receive Ventnorensis online."

"Just to let you know I am prepared to receive Ventnorensis online and applaud this initiative."

"I am happy to have Ventnorensis emailed. I know that I will read more if I have a hard copy but going to buy it in the shop will make me visit more often!"

"Happy to receive Ventnorensis electronically."

The Nos were more likely to set out their reasons:

"I understand all the reasons that you have given in asking me to receive Ventnorensis online but I still have to say no, I am not prepared to receive it online. I spend too much of my life dealing with work issues online and membership of the Friends is supposedly part of my downtime. If Ventnorensis becomes yet another chore, the probability is that I will drop out of the Friends entirely. Surely 40% of a subscription is better than no subscription?"

"I am not in principle against this idea. However, the experience of my Oxford college in making a similar change some years ago was not a happy one. We found that many old members just did not read the magazine online. People proved to be much less aware of what was going on in college as an outcome. Having a hard copy in the home is an everpresent invitation for it to be read (and by anyone who happens to notice it). And one thing that is vital for VBG is that the Friends are informed and energized on a regular basis. I would not object at all to a small increase in the subscription. It would still be very good value."

"I am reasonably sure that there are other members like myself who would either:- 1) willingly pay an increased subscription to cover the issue of the proper journal 2) would pay an additional sum on top of the sub by way of optional donation - to cover these costs, both of printing and postage of our individual copies. Why not issue a questionaire form to all members on this important issue, with those who are content with an online copy - you have no further worries, and for the rest of us tell us the full cost of each issue, and ask for the optional donation. Problems solved!"

So thank you all who took the time to reply. It was very nice to hear that *Ventnorensis* is considered worth having.

We will keep you informed about our thoughts. Roz Whistance, Editor

Deadline for contributions for Autumn Issue: September 20th

BBC GARDENER'S WORLD LIVE 2014

Taking a stand

When he was asked to put together an Island garden **Chris Kidd** hadn't bargained for it being in Birmingham . . .

At the end of April 2014 we were approached by Liz Walker, Destination Development Manager from Visit Isle of Wight Ltd, which each year takes stand space at exhibitions in the UK and abroad to promote the Isle of Wight. One of the most high profile is the BBC Good Food and Gardener's World at the NEC in June (approx. 240,000 visitors). This year they had space booked in the Gardener's Lifestyle section, in the 'Gardener's Inspiration' area, and wanted our help in putting together a garden. We met Liz and soon agreed to go ahead, despite a few problems that immediately sprung to mind.

The first difficulty was that the show was taking place over the same weekend as the Isle of Wight Festival, so transport across the Solent was going to be tricky. We were also putting in a design already agreed from Osborne House and The Garlic Farm, each of which had very firm ideas of how their plants should be exhibited. Finally the show is in Birmingham and not London, so initial schemes of quite how to manage the whole plant delivery and collection to and from the capital which involved pulling in favours – from everyone from ex-Kew colleagues to John Curtis' wife Mylene – were shelved. Only to require special favours from other ex-Kew colleagues and my own parents.

Star Award: VBG at NEC

With a complicated schedule ahead of us Jason and I collated the plants from around the Island and put the garden together in kit form in a hired lorry. Liz bore with us as the little surprises that punctuate and irritate on such adventures revealed themselves. I was able to send a text saying "On the ferry. No going back now." and we were on our way to stop overnight with the Head of Horticulture at Moreton Morrell in order to ensure we were at the NEC at 7am the following morning, as per the show schedule. The Show Schedule is a document more involved, precise and complex than Operation Overlord ever was fifty years previously.

So, at 7am the next day with hangovers the size of small European principalities we arrived at an almost empty NEC and tried to locate our space in a cavernous building.

It took about an hour to find anyone who knew anything about anything, by which time Jason had managed to decode the mysterious map to deduce where was our spot.

Quickly we began setting up the garden, hauling the plants from the lorry on Danish trolleys over acres of green carpet. We soon discovered the Astroturf we had was too small by half . . . and so the hunt was on to acquire some more. Bribes were offered, theft was given serious consideration and we even thought of asking Liz to flutter her eyelashes at the stand next door that had hectares of the stuff but wouldn't let us have any. Finally Jason came up with a roll of something similar from somewhere. (Sometimes it's better not to know.) The next thing we did was abandon the carefully laid out plan of how Osborne and The Garlic Farm wanted their plants to be shown. Our plants were just too good!

With the garden finished except for the delivery of the backdrop photographs that Julian Winslow had graciously and hurriedly taken, we headed back to the Island. Over the weekend the stand was greeted by thousands of visitors and attracted a Four Star Award from the RHS. We also sold some of the plants on breakdown day. The following day when I collected the plants the halls were as empty as before, our garden alone in a sea of green carpet.

Would we do it again? Well, immediately afterwards, tired and grubby we all agreed no. But, should the chance arise . . . could this be the first step towards Chelsea gold?

Membership Application*/Renewal form*

*Delete as appropriate

Please send to the Membership Secretary with your payment and/or the Standing Order Authority.

Title	First Name	Surname
Address		
		Postcode
E- Mail		
Telephone		
Name of Second Member at the same address		
Name of Junior Member/s (under 16) & date/s of birth		

Membership Rates with effect from 1st January 2013

The Membership year runs from 1st Jan to 31st December.

Individual	2nd at same address	Junior	Non UK
£15	£7	£2	£18

New Members joining after 1st July pay reduced rates:

Individual	2nd at same address	Junior	Non UK
£8	£4	£1	£10

GIFT MEMBERSHIP AVAILABLE

For details see our web site www.ventnorbotanicfriends.org.uk

Individual Membership	£
2nd Member at the same address	£
Junior Member/s	£
Non UK Member	£
Optional Donation	£
TOTAL	**£** _____

Signature Date

Membership Secretary: VBGFS Caroline Peel, Point Cottage, Beach Road, Bembridge PO35 5NQ.

giftaid it

By completing this Gift Aid declaration you enable Ventnor Botanic Gardens Friends' Society to claim tax back from the Government at no cost to yourself.

I/We would like Ventnor Botanic Gardens Friends' Society to reclaim tax on any eligible membership subscriptions or donations made by me/us until further notice.

membership subscriptions or donations made by me/us until further notice.

My/Our details are: First name.....Surname.....

First name.....Surname.....

Address.....

.....Postcode.....

Please be aware that you must have paid an amount of income and/or capital gains tax at least equal to the amount of tax reclaimed by all charities and Community Amateur Sports Clubs on all your donations in the tax year (6th April one year to 5th April the next).

Standing Order Authority

To be sent to the Membership Secretary **NOT** to your bank

To: The Manager (Name & Address of Bank)
Pay to the account of **Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society**, National Westminster Bank, Ventnor, Isle of Wight PO38 1RA Sort Code 54-41-31 Account No. 05441358 the sum of £..... .....Pounds AMOUNT IN FIGURES AND WORDS immediately and the sum of £..... .....Pounds AMOUNT IN FIGURES AND WORDS every 6 January thereafter until you receive notice from me in writing
Reference to be quoted (to be completed by VBGFS)
This order cancels any existing order in favour of this Payee
Signature Date
NAME OF ACCOUNT TO BE DEBITED
BANK SORT CODE ACCOUNT NUMBER

Thank you! Just a little bit more …

Storm damage: Can you help clad the Tropical House?

The Tropical House is being re-clad, thanks to money donated by you. We have spent £20,000 (from historical monies and the recent appeal) but another £12,000 is needed to complete the job. The BBC will soon be filming the Victoria Waterlilies which need better light levels for optimal growth.

Each panel costs £70. Could you make a donation? We urgently need to make progress this summer. Many thanks. Visit ***botanic.co.uk/news?id=64*** to find out how you can help. See Page 19
Chris Kershaw, Chairman

Gardening volunteers

meet every Wednesday morning, at the far end of the car park. Bring hand tools and a drink to have at coffee break.

DISCOUNTS for members

The following suppliers have kindly agreed to give discounts to Friends' Society members. Please be aware that discounts and other benefits of VBGFS membership are subject to change. **Remember to take your membership card with you – a discount will only be given if you show it.**

Eddington House Nursery	Eddington Road, Nettlestone/Seaview: 10% discount
Deacons Nursery	Moor View, Godshill: 10% discount.

Pied a terre

Design Walks take place on the first Friday of every month. Meet at the Visitor Centre at noon to learn about a new aspect of the Garden and to share your own ideas on how it should develop.

OBITUARY

Richard Smith

Richard Smith died recently at the age of 59.

Richard Smith

Richard's particularly reason for retiring to the Island was his love of Ventnor Botanic Garden. It was his great pleasure to be part of the gardening volunteers. He also enjoyed growing some of the subtropical plants in his garden. We found Richard a wise and sensible adviser for the volunteers and latterly he offered to take the chair at our meetings. When his cancer symptoms worsened earlier this year he sadly had to leave us.

Richard read physics at Oriel College, Oxford and went into banking and financial consultancy then finally worked in school finance, a job that he loved. He was passionate about giving children a good and happy education and when he moved to Shorwell became a governor of Niton school. He and Dilys were enthusiastic members of the Guith Carnival Morris Dancers and very involved in village life.

His funeral on 20th May was concluded with an old sea shanty sung by the Guith Singers. (Guith was the old name for the Island before the Romans came.)

It was a Christian based gathering led by Dave Ouston, and the service consisted of a eulogy, remembrances by his brother, and poetry reading by his son. The music at the beginning was Mahler's 5th Symphony and at the end the 7th Symphony of Shostakovich.

Donations were given for the Wessex Cancer Trust 'Daisy Bus' and the Earl Mountbatten Hospice.

Rosemary Stewart

Great pleasure: Richard loved Ventnor Botanic Garden. Photograph by Julian Winslow

Weather in the Garden

(mid February – June 2014)

Deluge to drought to Saharan sand. The contrasts were striking and led to Magnolias at their best, says **Chris Watts**

Thankfully everything was in a much quieter mood over the Spring than it had been over the winter. The weather generally settled down after the Valentines Day storm, and even though the second half of February still brought a little rain such that the month ended up with only two completely dry days, this rain was much lighter and the winds were more calm than in the first half.

So after the deluge came the drought! An absolute drought of 17 consecutive dry days occurred from the 3rd to the 19th March, and what a welcome contrast this was to previous days. The icing on the cake came as March avoided any air frost, resulting in a magnificent display by the magnolias. On the morning of the 31st a dusting of Saharan sand covered the area.

April also brought a good dry spell of ten days between the 9th and 18th. Unfortunately the weather broke over the rather late Easter weekend, and the Sunday (20th) was the wettest and coldest day of the month. The early Bank Holiday in May, however, was blessed with some dry and sunny weather, just before a five day period of very strong winds, from the 7th to the 11th. Thereafter unsettled conditions took hold, some sun, some rain and showers – occasionally thundery. A spectacular display of fork lightning over the Channel occurred on the evening of the 19th.

If you accept that the occasional shower is all part of summer scene, then June was a very pleasant month, mostly dry, warm and sunny. The overall rate of rainfall was 3.0 mm/hr, which reflected the showery, rather than frontal, nature of the weather. There were mixed fortunes for the Round the Island yacht race on the 21st: not much joy for the sailors who recorded the slowest time ever due to lack of wind, but brilliant for the spectators who enjoyed blue skies from dawn to dusk on the solstice, 14.9 hours of sun measured.

	Mean Temp C	Air Frost Duration Hrs (No. of nights)	Rain mm	Wet Days (1+ mm)	Rain Duration Hrs
Feb	*8.2++*	*0.0(0)*	*147.2++*	*23*	*67.1*
March	*9.2++*	*0.0(0)*	*49.8*	*7*	*28.0*
April	*11.2++*	*0.0(0)*	*69.8++*	*13*	*39.6*
May	*13.0+*	*0.0(0)*	*85.5++*	*11*	*36.5*
June	*16.2++*	*0.0(0)*	*31.7---*	*6*	*10.6*

Note: Cols 2, 4, 5 No sign: about average
++/--- : significantly above/below average
+/– : modestly above/below average

Progress on Tropical House

Emergency replacement of critically damaged panels was undertaken during winter. We have now (commencing 17th June 2014) begun the systematic replacement of panels. A significant cost has been the hiring and transportation of a cherry picker to reach the highest elevation. For financial prudence we are re-prioritising the highest north and south elevations: the vertical west and east elevations will follow. (If the Tropical House were an inverted boat, we will complete everything below the Plimsoll line first.) The outstanding priority (before autumn storms) of seriously degraded south facing panels on the lowest elevation can be addressed with a smaller, cheaper cherry picker. We'll have then an overall timescale for completion. However, funds previously raised and from our most recent appeal mean we will have replaced only 228 panels, leaving 74 outstanding. **This is why we are making a new appeal – see Page 16.**

And Drive Thru' Botanic Garden

Bear in mind that this work was delayed by the worst winter rains ever recorded in the British Isles. Had we pushed ahead with the heavy plant work as planned we would surely have had a serious accident. Slipperiness combined with the steep gradients meant 20 tonne diggers moving in directions not in keeping with safe practice.

The heavy landscaping work on this phase has now been completed; however the lateness has pushed us into the maintenance part of our horticultural cycle. The heavy landscaping was affected by limitations placed on us by Island Roads: in response we opened up a significantly larger (c33%) area of the site for cultivation, allowing us to add a significant fifth planting scheme. The five planting schemes will be:

A) Arid, predominantly South African xerophytes; B) Eucalyptus scrub, coppiced species for syrup production; C) *Echium pininana* forest; D) Agapanthus monoculture; E) Puya and *Geranium maderense* bank

Through the five schemes will be planted the Palms, which will give structure many years down the line.

Planting of 1000 *Echium pininana* is complete, first phase of Agapanthus planted, Xerophytes mostly planted, 10 Washingtonia robusta planted, Puya species and *Geranium maderense* purchased and being grown on to planting size in nursery. Once these plants have grown to a rabbit-proof size we will be seeing several thousand Puya and *Geranium maderense* in vast blocks. The palms, bought in 2013 to gain heavy discount, have had to have their arrival dates pushed back significantly.

It has been noted by a number of Friends and visitors that after heavy rain a large pool of water forms below the rockface opposite the Garden's main entrance: speculation is that this is a consequence of the Drive Thru' project. At the centre of this pooling water is a drain in the road which, for years prior to the CIC, has been inefficient after heavy rain. Certainly the removal of the weed tree canopy above has allowed more water to reach the road, but the wider 90% of the Drive Thru' site does not shed water into the road. Over time the Aizoaceae plants over the rock face will create a larger surface area to dissipate rain. However the problem of the drain will remain until Island Roads act.

Chris Kidd, Curator

Little Star of Beautiful Form

Arthur Hill Hassall was a remarkable pioneer of health reform, invoking the removal of poison from foods and setting up the Old Hospital, VBG's site. So it is fitting, says recent VBG lecturer **A H Taylor,** that his name is recorded for his work on blooms – algae blooms

I first came across Arthur Hill Hassall when working in a laboratory by the side of Windermere. This, the largest freshwater lake in the English Lake District, is 17km long and 1km wide, with an average depth of 20m and a deepest point at 65m from the surface. In winter it is uniformly cold from top to bottom, but as it warms up through the spring and summer, the temperature near the surface increases while temperature further down hardly changes. The density difference between top and bottom hinders mixing up and down the water column, so that algae at the surface do not get transported into the dark very much. As this warming occurs and daylight increases, an explosive growth of algae takes place.

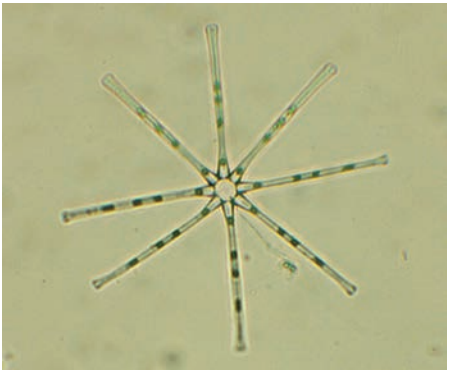
The first algae to bloom in the year are diatoms, characterised by their delicate outer shell of silica. This is a form of glass and must appear as such to the animals that eat them. These algae appear first because they grow well at low temperatures and tolerate the low light levels that occur early in the year, particularly when the lake is fully mixed. Diatoms dominate the oceans and are responsible for about a fifth of the primary productivity (plant growth) on Earth. In Windermere, their growth in the spring is so prolific that they eventually consume all of the silica dissolved in the near-surface water. The density-differences between the surface and bottom prevents the silica being replenished by mixing with the nutrient-rich waters below. Depletion of silica eventually causes the diatom population to collapse, and the dying cells sink to the lake bed. The loss of cells leads to a period of increased water clarity early in the summer, but this is soon followed by the growth of other species of algae.

It was discovered by Hassall when he investigated water-borne cholera and typhoid in Victorian London

In Windermere the spring bloom of diatoms is almost always dominated by *Asterionella Formosa* (Hassell), a colonial species which forms star-shaped clusters of cells. It was discovered and named 'the little star of beautiful form' by Dr Arthur Hill Hassall in the 19th Century when he was investigating outbreaks of water-borne cholera and typhoid in water samples from Victorian London. Hassall had studied botany at Kew and published on botanical topics, particularly freshwater algae. He came to public attention with his 1850 book *A microscopical examination of the water supplied to the inhabitants of London and the suburban districts,* which became an influential work in promoting the cause of water reform. But Hassall's interest in the causes of sickness extended much wider than this.

During the 1850s, Hassall examined some 2500 samples obtained from food outlets all over London. This was an age of unbridled capitalism, combined with widespread

ignorance about the effects of chemical substances. Apart from alum and disgusting parasites in bread and sugar, he found chromates of lead and bisulphate of mercury used as colouring in children's sweets along with other compounds of copper, lead and mercury, and strychnine and iron in beer. Hassall's investigations led to the 1875 Food and Drug Adulteration Act.



Asterionella formosa (Hassell)

As we all know, Hassall subsequently moved on to work on another health problem associated with Dickensian times, consumption, setting up the Royal National Hospital for Consumption and Diseases of the Chest in 1866, which was a pioneer in the field of sanatorium care for 80 years. But his name is still recorded in a very different field, the study of freshwater algae.

This is taken from Taylor, A.H. (2011) *The Dance of Air and Sea: How Oceans, Weather and Life Link Together,* Oxford University Press.

The following are Arthur Hill Hassall's books:

The Microscopic Anatomy of the Human Body in Health and Disease. S. Highley, London 1846

A microscopical examination of the water supplied to the inhabitants of London and the suburban districts. S. Highley, London 1850

San Remo and the Western Riviera Climatically and Medically Considered. Longmans, Green, and Co., London 1883

A compendium of food-microscopy with sections on drugs, water, and tobacco. Baillière, Tindall and Cox, London 1909

A history of the British freshwater Algae, including descriptions of the. Desmidiaceae and Diatomaceae. pp. vi, 462. Atlas, 103 ph. col 8. London, 1845.

Pass it on!

Don't forget, Friends get a huge **25% off annual passes** to the Garden on production of their membership card!

A single Annual Pass (for 1 adult) costs £30 – so to Friends, £22.50

Joint Annual Pass (for 2 adults) is £54 – but to Friends, £40.50

Family Annual Pass (for 1 adult and up to 3 children) is £72 – but to Friends, £54

Family Annual Pass (for 2 adults and up to 3 children) is £96 – but to Friends, £72

Look out for the new Summer Passes. For just £7.50 per child and £12.50 per adult, visiting is made easy and affordable as you can enjoy **unlimited access to the Garden** between the 19th July and the 1st September. (No discount for Friends.)

VENTNOR BOTANIC GARDEN FRIENDS' SOCIETY

Annual General Meeting 2014

The Chairman's Report. Dr Chris Kershaw, Chairman, thanked John and Mylene Curtis for maintaining renovations and developments at a cracking pace. Our gratitude extends to the Curator and other hard working staff. The Friends have tried to support the CIC with an increasing pool of volunteers with specialist roles appropriate for a rapidly evolving organisation.

There was ongoing support for the Pond Project and the Olive Grove. We drew down funds for emergency repair of the damaged Tropical House panes, and to create the 'Drive Thru' garden on the opposite side of Undercliff Drive. A marquee has been purchased to use at big shows like Wolverton and Chale. IT equipment has been upgraded and B & Q donated tools for the gardeners.

Photograph by Julian Winslow

Much individual voluntary effort has been expended by the Friends to promote the Garden and its educational objectives, particularly Joy Munro who developed a web-based programme for schools. New links were forged with Portsmouth University Biological Sciences, St Francis School and the IW College. First Aid training was provided and there is a new volunteer infrastructure after successful recruiting sessions helped by grants from Groundwork UK. We have introduced CountryWatch and Change Direction to the Garden as well as helping to establish the Botany Club.

We must thank the teams who raised considerable funds at the NGS Open Gardens scheme, the Plant Sale and Garden Tours. There have been a number of gifts and donations and the families of our good friends Gordon Morton and Betty Davis have bought memorial olive trees.

We were delighted to welcome His Excellency Keiishi Hayashi, the Japanese Ambassador and his staff during his visit to the Island.

We lost the valuable services of key officers, Jean Kelley and Virginia Newbold and Committee members Vic Hickin and Margaret Morris. Philip Le May also stood down after remaining Vice Chairman in the Chairman's inaugural year. He will still be working on securing specific grants from outside bodies and keep his role as special advisor. We are pleased to welcome David Grist in his place. We urgently need new members to assist with marketing, fund raising or education.

A new era in the Garden is just beginning with the launch, at the Summer Garden Party, of a Trust for Horticulture Apprentices. We urge you to give your full support to this and to other fund raising initiatives, and demonstrate your allegiance to our cause.

The Financial Report and Accounts was accepted. Membership Fees would not be raised in 2015.

Officers elected to the Executive Committee were: Chairman, Surg. Capt. Chris Kershaw; Vice Chairman, David Grist; Secretary, Rosemary Stewart; Treasurer, Kay Grist. Committee: Ken Payne, Caroline Peel, Sally Peake, Colin Smith, Ros Whistance, Jan Wyers.

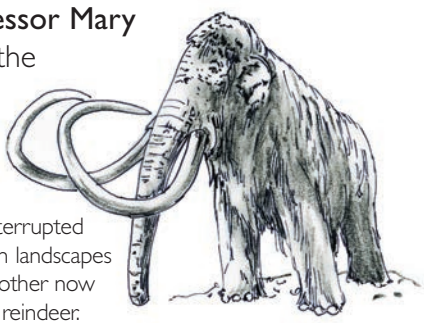
Mr Brian Kidd, President, thanked CIC Director, John Curtis, the Committee and members for all their hard work. He had sent over three coach loads from Portsmouth in the past year.

John Curtis gave a comprehensive illustrated talk on 'Taking on a Garden'.

EDUCATION

Mammoths, Microbes and Methane

As part of the Garden's lecture series, **Professor Mary Edwards** of Southampton University made the connection between things large and small



It may seem strange to invoke a connection between mammoths and global warming, but there is one! The Quaternary period of Earth's history (the past two million years) has featured about 20 cycles of cold, glacial climate, interrupted by shorter, warm interglacial periods. The ice sheets and open landscapes at each glacial stage supported mammoth, woolly rhino and other now extinct animals, as well as the more familiar horse, bison and reindeer.

It has long puzzled ecologists how such large animals thrived in the harsh conditions of ice age Earth. Science is helped by deposits of loess, or wind-blown silt from cold, dry glacial climates across large areas of Siberia and Alaska. They preserve the remains of animals (even frozen mummies), plants and soils as they gradually build up, acting as a giant natural freezer. Paleoecological studies using fossil pollen, other plant remains, and even DNA fragments have gradually revealed what the animals ate: a rich mix of grasses, sedges and other herbaceous flowering plants, some typical of tundra and others of steppe. *Artemisia* (mugwort, wormwood), *Plantago* (plantain), *Armeria* (thrift), and *Pulsatilla* (pasque flower) mingled with *Saxifraga* (saxifrage), *Potentilla* (cinquefoil) and *Primula* (primrose). Fertilized by the mineral-rich loess and the recycling of nutrients via animal droppings, this vegetation provided adequate forage for the ice-age mammals.

During cold periods the land surface grows upwards many metres through the accumulating silt and biological remains, and by the inflating effect of associated ice wedges. In doing so, the Earth takes in carbon (originally fixed from the atmosphere via photosynthesis). With the end of the glacial period, the frozen deposits become subject to erosion by expanding rivers and retreating coastlines, and heat input to the surface melts ice, forming thaw sinks and thaw lakes. The Russian word, *yedoma,* refers to the resultant complex dissected landscape. With these processes in the ascendancy, the Earth loses carbon dioxide and methane (natural greenhouse gases) to the atmosphere as microbes, activated by warming temperatures under ponds and in exposed banks, beginning the process of decay. Hence frozen carbon from the plant the mammoth didn't eat (and from the one it did that is contained in its droppings) is released to the atmosphere!

These large-scale biogeochemical processes form part of every glacial cycle, and efforts are underway to estimate just how much carbon is transferred between land and atmosphere. The accelerated warming of Arctic lands may drive further transfer of carbon dioxide and methane to the atmosphere.

So why did many mammal species became extinct at the end of the last glacial period? Certainly the habitat became far less favourable; however, the animals survived similar transformations in the past. Experts suggest expanding populations of modern humans tipped the balance this last time. History probably has lessons for us here, too.

Bee Orchid, Ophrys apifera
by Rosemary Stewart

Botany Club

Chris Kidd invites us all to come along, and **Jo Kirkpatrick** describes some thrilling discoveries on the June visit to Mount Joy, Carisbrooke Cemetery

Launched in September 2013 the VBG Botany Club is aimed at anyone with an interest in gardens or gardening, botany, horticulture or the great outdoors. Although it is called Botany Club the range and scope of what we do is wide and varied, from basic to advanced, depending on what members want. We meet once a month at VBG, on the second Wednesday of each month at 2pm, usually in the Echium Room. In between we have visits and workshops both on the Island and the mainland. Each month is different, with guest experts in their fields. You can join our meetings or trips out without being a member, though the price is higher. So it makes sense to join, £25 is the annual subscription.

In May Botany Club began its summer campaign of visiting botanically rich sites across the Island. We visited the Newtown Nature Reserve accompanied by Bill Shepard. Bill is co-author of the Isle of Wight Flora and well known for his extraordinary knowledge of the Island and its natural history. The reserve is on MOD land and only open on one day each year. Over the course of three hours we observed masses of the Green Winged Orchid, *Orchis morio,* and encountered the enigmatic fern Adder's Tongue, *Ophioglossum vulgatum* and learned of another location, visited later, where it grows in even greater profusion – the Isle of Wight Festival site. Our finds were not limited to plants; accompanied by Dr David Biggs we found many interesting galls, including the first record of *Contarinia melanocera* on *Genista tinctoria* at this site.

In June we visited Carisbrooke Cemetery, also known as Mount Joy. There was a lot to see, at least four species of orchid and any number of interesting meadow flowers generally. We observed the effects of sympathetic mowing regimes on assisting habitat creation for wild flowers, and also the devastating effects of inappropriate mowing during flowering season. Even a single out of season mowing can significantly reduce a species: food for thought for any fool thinking simply stopping mowing their lawn will result in a wild flower meadow. We also observed a number of grass species including *Desmazeria rigida* growing alongside *Thymus drucei* on a derelict tarmac path, and three species of dryland fern growing from beneath a single wall coping stone.

Who cannot be pleased to see the Bee Orchid, *Ophrys apifera*? 2014 has proven to be a bumper year for this species with a greater count for this cemetery than has been known for many years. The photograph by Rosemary Stewart shows very clearly the twin pollinia hanging from above the flower which mimics the female bee of the species *Eucera pulveraceae. Ophrys apifera* engages a pollination strategy of pseudocopulation

where male bees, attracted to pheromones and the presentation of what looks like a female, attempt to copulate with the flower, their vigorous workings ensuring transfer of the pollinia first to their thorax, and then onwards to a new flower.

The July meeting will hopefully see Botany Club locate the three Island endemic flowering plants, Field Cow Wheat, *Melampyrum arvense*, the Hoary Stock, *Matthiola incana* and Wood Calamint, *Calamintha ascendens*.

Chris Kidd

June's Botany Club was a visit to Mount Joy Cemetery with the aim of searching out Orchid species growing in their natural environment. The visit also provided the opportunity to study the diverse range of plants growing on the chalky grassland of Mount Joy.

Orchid observers: Jo, Louise, Chris, Julie, Chris and Sylvia

The group met in the Priory car park behind Carisbrooke Castle and followed Chris Kidd across the road to the entrance. It was a beautiful, warm, sunny June afternoon. Immediately to the right of the path as you enter the cemetery there is a steep bank which was teaming with flora and fauna!! Bees, butterflies, and the stunning Burnet moth busied about, darting from one species of meadow flower to another. There is a steady climb up the path to the Cemetery where a large swathe of Yellow Rattle *(Rhinanthus minor)* has colonised a vast area.

Being ancient chalk grassland, Mount Joy is a fantastic habitat for wildlife and incredibly rich in plant life. Here we saw our first Pyramid Orchid *(Anacamptis pyramidalis)*, very exciting as I had only seen the earlier-flowering Spotted Orchid *(Orchis mascula)* growing and colonising a copse close to my home.

This was all quite new and fascinating to me. Being a horticulturalist, I know a bit about cultivated plants, but have an awful lot to learn about identifying wild species of flowers and grasses. Other species identified included Cowslip *(Primula veris)*, Kidney vetch *(Anthyllis vulneraria)*, Quaking grass *(Briza media)* and Sheep's Fescue *(Festuca rubra)*, plus too many more to mention (and names I cannot remember)! A little further there was much excitement as the beautiful Bee Orchid *(Ophrys apifera)* was discovered.

The view from the top of Mount Joy is panoramic and quite breathtaking!

Unfortunately, only a part of the Cemetery has been left to colonise. The area that is home to the newer graves has been mown to make it look neat and tidy; the difference in plant life and wildlife is quite staggering as a result. No buzzing and humming, no colour, no diversity – I know which I prefer.

Jo Kirkpatrick

The Inaugural Summer Garden Party

Such was the success of the Great Summer Garden Party that the Exec Committee voted to make it an annual event. Organiser **Caroline Peel** describes the dazzling event from conception to highly successful execution . . .

Auctioning a Puya

An idea that was formed by John Curtis and me over a delicious cup of coffee in the Plantation Room on a wet Thursday in November last year, materialised into what we hope will be the first of many Summer Garden Parties for the Friends.

The brief was firstly to raise the awareness of the Garden round the Island – it is amazing how many residents are ignorant of this jewel of the South – and secondly to raise funds for Horticultural Apprenticeships. In order to maximise coverage an excellent Committee was formed of supporters from all corners of the Island, and they all worked incredibly hard in harvesting their friends to come and share the experience.

Sunshine in the Café Garden

Finally on a glorious sunny Sunday evening 135 guests arrived at the Garden to be met by Volunteers eager to share their knowledge of the Garden and plants, and to wander through to the Palm Garden for pre-supper Moscow Mules and canapés, and to enjoy music by JC and Angelina. Then after partaking in the Tree of Life stall, manned by Eliza Cudmore, Theo Seely, Tom and William Leon and Ben Walters, they went into a beautifully decorated marquee.

Drinks in the Palm Garden

Echium painting by Charles Inge

Adrian Biddell, head of the 19th Century Paintings Department at Sotheby's, kindly volunteered to be the auctioneer. Adrian has strong Island links and was very keen to help this worthwhile cause. There was an eclectic range of lots – a charming oil painting of primroses by local artist Charles Inge, a giclée print of the magnificent painting of the Echium also by Charles. There was another giclée print of Jill Roe's wonderful watercolour of the hydrangea dell, a five-day holiday in a Riad in Marrakesh, and a flight in a Tiger Moth. All these had been generously donated by friends of Friends. In addition there were sealed bids

which included a trip round Philip Le May's hardly ever seen garden, and a trailer load of manure.

All in all the evening was a huge success and at time of writing I think we have raised just over £10,000 for the Friends. A HUGE debt of gratitude is owed to the amazing and hard-working Committee of Susannah Seely, Lauren Cudmore, Susie Leon, Ken and Sue Payne, Nick and Nicky Hayward, Phil Le May, Kay and David Grist, as none of it would have happened without their help. Kirsty, who manages front of house at the Garden, was also invaluable.

I know that a number of Friends felt that the ticket price was quite steep, however in order to make an impact we felt that to charge a lower price would not have been viable. The feedback has been fantastic: a lot of people felt that they had missed out on a great evening and the membership has increased slightly.

. . . and then shares some of her tips with **Roz Whistance** for next year's organiser

Caroline: Lynchpin

When it comes to organizing charity events, Caroline Peel has form. As Commodore of Bembridge Sailing Club she ran, she says, more Bembridge Balls than she cares to remember, and three years ago she organised the RNLI winter ball, in aid of the Bembridge Lifeboat Appeal. "When I took it on there was one of those serial committee people who clearly didn't think I had it in me," she laughs. Adopting the squeezed tones of a woman who doesn't allow clarity to compromise her stiff upper lip, she quotes: "Now do tell me, have you ever run a wedding, or a ball like this?" The committee lady needn't have worried. Under Caroline's leadership the RNLI ball exceeded the seemingly unreachable target of £125,000 by £100,000.

This was the experience she brought to VBG's Big Garden Party, and she can now reflect on the experience for the benefit of next year's chief organiser.

Roz: *Where do you start with something like this?*

Caroline: *Getting a good committee together is vital. I invited people who would cover specific areas to raise interest:– Suzannah Seely covered West Wight, Lauren Cudmore had Cowes, I covered Bembridge and Ken and Sue Payne, with Nick Hayward, the whole Island. We had a lot of fun evenings under the excellent chairmanship of Phil Le May. And we did a lot of praying for it not to rain.*

Roz: *What were you most encouraged by?*

Caroline: *By peoples' generosity in giving gifts – paintings, their holiday homes, their time.*

Roz: *What was the best piece of advice you were given?*

Caroline: *Nick Hayward said to keep the food simple.*

Roz: *Anything you'd do differently?*

Caroline: *There were mistakes – we did sealed bids, and in retrospect I should have put one big envelope per table for this, because some got lost.*

Roz: *Any surprises or disappointments?*

Caroline: *I was upset that one or two things didn't go for more money. What did go were the more quirky things or one-offs such as garden tours or holidays. Chris Bland gave a trip in his Tiger Moth, saying it was at your own risk – "Old plane, old pilot and no insurance!"*

Roz: *What advice would you give to the person or people taking it on next year?*

Caroline: *It's a lot of fun but also a lot of hard work, particularly on the admin side. Don't be afraid to ask: the Yarmouth Deli were very generous with their canapés, as was Woodfords the Butchers in Bembridge. But you can't hit the same people every time.*

Thank people. John Curtis gave me some day passes for the Garden which I enclosed with my thank you letters. Who knows, these people could well become Friends as a result.

New members

A very WARM WELCOME to these friends who have recently joined the Society.

Mrs Dorian Campbell and Mr Nigel Maclean ..... Bembridge
Mrs Rosamond Poncia ..... Bembridge
Mrs Christine Konig ..... Bembridge
Mrs Elizabeth White ..... Bembridge
Mrs Christine Hockly ..... St. Catherines
Mr Scott and Mrs Anne Macgregor ..... Bonchurch
Mrs Mencia Scott ..... Shalfleet
Mrs Helen Mathieson ..... Bembridge
Lady Grylls ..... Bembridge
Mr Barry and Mrs Lesley Myland ..... East Cowes
Mr Robert and Mrs Sarah Danzig ..... Newport
Mrs Jennie Burke ..... Ventnor
Mr Gavin Graham and Ms Brigid O'Grady ..... Yarmouth
Mr Graham and Mrs Christine Benson ..... Ventnor
Mr Andrew and Mrs Jane Prideaux ..... Bembridge

Honorary members

Alan Titchmarsh • Simon Goodenough • Brian Kidd

Enveloping Anne with thanks!

For many years it has been thanks to Anne Wood that *Ventnorensis* arrives on your mat. She has collected the boxes of magazines as soon as they arrive at the Garden from the printer and taken them home to stuff them into envelopes and post. There's such a thing as too much fun, so now Anne has announced her retirement. Thanks so much for your patience and efficiency Anne.

COCO DESIGN CO

Established in 1995

Graphic Design & Illustration signs | artist impressions | magazines | flyers | adverts | logos ...

Telephone: 07530 867318 & 01983 551527 simone.whitehurst@googlemail.com

Design by Simone Dickens, Coco Design Co. Tel: 07530 867318 / 01983 551527 simone.whitehurst@googlemail.com

VOLUNTEERING AT VBG

Be careful what you admit to

You might think you're offering to do a bit of weeding but may end up wielding a paintbrush, says **John Stoneman** (or 'Weed Monkey')

'Never volunteer'. That is what was drummed into us as callow students. A few decades mellows the attitudes, so here we are, newly volunteered, wondering what we've let ourselves in for.

The first obstacle is introductions, though fortunately most of the volunteers are of an age, so we'll all have difficulty in remembering who's called what as time goes by.

A tour of the Garden reveals more problems. It's full of strange flora, and it's big. It will be easy to get lost, even with a map. Being told that roughly 22 acres is relatively small for a botanic garden is no reassurance.

Then there are the names. Every plant has a real name and a made-up scientific name which is in Latin. Of course, everyone on the payroll uses the Latin name first, then grudgingly translates into 'Angel's Fishing Rod' or something similar. And the Garden has an abundance of flora which doesn't grow outdoors anywhere else in the country – just to make the nomenclature even more confusing.

Each week, before we are allocated our tasks, the Curator, Chris, gives a talk about some aspect of the Garden. It could be about a spectacular flowering, an endangered tree which no longer survives in the wild or any topical Garden occurrence.

The volunteers' duties are many and varied. It is surprising how much is achieved quickly if several people are assigned the same task. Weeding presents a major snag to the novice. The weeds are indistinguishable from the cultivated stock. We have to be vigilant and not uproot a prize exhibit and chuck it on the trailer bound for the compost heap. Most of us can recognise ivy, bindweed, nettles and *kniphofia bruceae*, but beyond that is a mystery. Careful observation of what the old hands are pulling up prevents most mistakes. Naturally some cherished flowers are classified as weeds – even more confusion. Is the bluebell, regarded by non-botanists as a quintessential English wild woodland flower, a weed? Certainly in the Australian garden. As the bluebell is not native to Australia they have to be dug up. By the hundred.

Other tasks include planting, propagating and miscellaneous. If you are unguarded enough to casually reveal your experience and knowledge from a previous life you might be asked to paint benches or toilets, help out at shows, bookkeeping or DIY. So be careful what you say if you don't want a continuation of your previous work. Better to claim you lived a life of sheer indolence, then very little is expected of you.

On the whole an enjoyable, sociable and rewarding experience, despite the 'never volunteer' maxim.

Chris talks to Volunteers

OPEN 7 DAYS A WEEK 9AM - 5PM

THE GARLIC FARM

ON THE ISLE OF WIGHT

EAT at our restaurant where our renowned chef creates tasty garlic dishes and much more. **SHOP** in our unique farm shop where a treasure trove of unusual and gourmet treats await you. In our Education & Heritage Centres you can **LEARN** all about garlic and the history of the farm. At weekends **ENJOY** a ride around The Garlic Farm on our tractor trailer. **TASTE** our range of pickles & garlic.

THE GARLIC FARM

FOR ALL THINGS GARLIC AND MUCH MORE

The Garlic Farm, Mersley Lane, Newchurch, Isle of Wight, PO36 0NR

Tel: (01983) 867333 www.thegarlicfarm.co.uk